

What is it about (older childless) men?

Not being a father: the experiences of involuntarily childless men as they age.

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1. Introduction

The aim of this study is to examine the lives of older childless men, aged between 50 -70 years, who wanted to become fathers. How does involuntary childlessness (ICn) impact on their attitudes, behaviours, health, identity, and wellbeing? Research in the field of older men who are involuntarily childless (IC) is important:

i: Actual and projected demographic change (ONS, 2009).

ii: The lack of research material on IC men as they age (Dykstra and Keizer, 2009).

3. Involuntary childlessness

Becoming a biological parent accords status such as: social identity; genetic immortality; and prestige (Veevers 1973). As many as 1 in 6 UK couples seek medical help because of problems in conceiving. Those who experience ICn and do not seek treatment are not recorded. A diagnosis of potential or actual infertility can have significant implications for identity, mental and physical health, wellbeing, and wider relationships (Bartlam, 1996). The psycho-social effects of ICn are under-researched and men are generally excluded from this research (Dykstra and Keizer 2009)

5. Involuntarily childless men

Recent research indicates that childless men and women have a equal desire for biological parenthood with the men indicating higher levels of depression and isolation as (Hadley, 2009). IC men also demonstrated similar responses to those in infertility treatment including: complex bereavement, depression, isolation, substance abuse, and addiction (Hadley, 2008). Divorced and widowed childless men demonstrated higher rates of depression than divorced and widowed women (Zhang and Hayward, 2001).

2. Demographics

Many studies have highlighted the global population trend of an increasingly ageing population and a declining fertility rate (Dykstra, 2009):

i: The UK population is predicted to rise to 71.6 million by 2033.

ii: Those aged 85 and over increasing to 3.3 million by 2033 (ONS, 2009).

Demand for the provision of social and health care services increases with age:

i: Familial care demand is projected to grow by about 90% by 2041 (Pickard et al., 2009).

4. Older men

Gerontological research, having highlighted the disadvantages faced by older women, also reveals the need for exploration of the disadvantages experienced by some groups of older men (Arber et al., 2003a). Recent studies have indicated that older, childless men, have smaller social networks and poorer behaviour in terms of health, diet, self-care, and wellbeing than those married with children (Dykstra and Keizer, 2009). Moreover, partner-less older men are more likely to be placed in residential care compared to lone older women (Davidson and Arber, 2006).

6. Method

Participants will be recruited through groups representing older people, and those working with people who identify themselves as IC. Each participant will be interviewed twice:

i: The first an in-depth life course type.

ii: The second interview will centre on the participant's meanings emerging from the first meeting.

NVivo software will be used for data storage and retrieval and to facilitate a detailed thematic analysis. Ethical approval has been obtained for this project.